

*Govt Assn file  
wire tap file*

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Front Edit Other  
Page Page Page

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# Spare a Dime, Buddy? My Phone's Tapped

By Don Smith

Newsday Washington Bureau

Washington—From file clerk to department head, you have one thing in common if you work for a government agency here. At some time or other it's probably a fair bet that your phone has been tapped.

And if you are a private citizen suspected of a federal crime, it's a safe bet

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the federal investigative agency concerned has been listening to your conversations. One federal investigator who performs wiretaps said: "It's being done all over Washington, in and out of government, by anyone who has a few bucks to spend on all sorts of devices that can intercept a telephone call."

Another agent who says he also has been called upon by officials to tap wires said: "There's no end to wiretapping. People are tapping lines of other people who are tapping lines of other people." One government employee in a security area detailed a case where a supervisor ordered a tap of an employee's line as a security check. He learned quickly from a security man that the employee had the supervisor's own line bugged. It turned out that the employee was keeping tabs on his boss for higher officials.

Under federal law, wiretapping is not a crime. Only when the information learned

is divulged is it illegal. But there is where the controversy turns. The Justice Department maintains that wiretaps can be used as long as information is not passed out of the agency. Opponents argue that the minute a report is made of a conversation to a superior it has been divulged.

Reasons for the government's use of wiretaps vary from agency to agency. In highly sensitive departments—State, Defense, the Central Intelligence Agency—it is considered a "security must" to keep tabs on who is saying what to whom. At high levels in these agencies wiretapping is avoided by the use of scrambler devices on key phones.

A federal agent defended such wiretaps, saying: "Even though we can't use what we get out of a tap in court, in sensitive posts we can alert officials that somebody is risky and get them out before harm is done." Within Washington there are more than 25,000 persons classified as investigators. In less sensitive government agencies wiretaps are used chiefly as a means of checking up on how a person is performing.